

PROMINENT GLASGOW NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY ZOOLOGISTS

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(with a note by E.G. Hancock)

“Though from the beginning much of its best work was done by amateurs, it nevertheless received recognition by men of professional standing; and from early days the University seems to have realised the importance of the work being done. This happy association between those actively engaged in teaching and research in the natural sciences and the ‘field naturalists’ to whom the outer world made irresistible appeal has all along continued a characteristic of the Society, and is indeed one of its most valuable and cherished features”. In these words the well-known and much respected amateur botanist, the late John R. Lee, a past president, succinctly conveyed the spirit and character of the Society on the occasion of the centenary celebrations in 1951. It is true to say that even after the passage of a further 50 years and the great emphasis now placed on analytical approaches such as molecular biology and biochemistry Lee’s words still apply and there remains a close rapport between the professionals and amateurs in numerous fields of discipline.

The present society, was formed in 1931 as an amalgam of three earlier societies, the *Natural History Society of Glasgow* (founded 1851 and here abbreviated to *NHSG*), the *Andersonian Naturalists’ Society* (*ANS* founded 1885) and the *Microscopical Society of Glasgow* (*MSG*, founded 1886). At first known as the *Glasgow and Andersonian Natural History and Microscopical Society*, later shortened to the *Andersonian Naturalists of Glasgow*, the present name, the *Glasgow Natural History Society* (*GNHS*) was adopted in 1979. *NHSG* had its own journal, the *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* (1858-1883) (*Proc.*), succeeded by the *Proceedings and Transactions of the Natural History Society of Glasgow* (*New Series*) (1883-1908) (*Proc. & Trans*) and finally by the *Glasgow Naturalist* (1908 onwards) (*G. Nat*) *ANS* had its own journal *The Annals of the Andersonian Naturalists’ Society* (1914-1925) (*Ann.*).

Throughout its history the membership of the Society has been favoured with an impressive succession of distinguished zoologists. Many served on the Council, held office, published in its journals, attended meetings, ran excursions and / or were involved in various other activities. Others, often living furth of Glasgow, or corresponding members, had little involvement but nevertheless were sympathetic to the aims of the Society and by

their work helped to set standards which were an inspiration to all. In a short biographical account, such as this, it is impossible to pay due homage to all of these, so some selection had to be made. Thus only those who actively contributed to the work of the Society are included even though this meant cutting out some famous names that appeared on the membership lists.

The Rev. David Landsborough, (died 1854), was a distinguished early member with wide interests, not only in zoology, but also in botany, geology, palaeontology and archaeology. He produced many publications amongst which was the *Popular History of British Zoophytes* (Corals, Sponges etc.). His son, also the Rev. David Landsborough (1826-1912), became a corresponding member of *NHSG* in 1887 and at first worked with his father but later became a distinguished marine zoologist with particular interests in molluscs and zoophytes. He produced numerous publications some of which appeared in *Proc. & Trans.* The nudibranch mollusc, *Eolis laudsborgii*, was named in his honour.

Still within the field of marine zoology, David Robertson, LL.D., F.L.S., F.G.S. (1806-96) joined *NHSG* in 1852 and was president 1887-90. A largely self-taught man, as a boy and youth he worked in various manual, mainly farming jobs but attended night school from the age of 21. He became a medical student but discontinued before taking his final examinations and set up a pottery warehouse which he ran until 1860. Interested in natural history from an early age, after retirement he was able to devote his whole attention to it and settled in Millport where he collected, observed and described animals caught on the shore and dredged from the bottom. While there he entertained a young German, Anton Dohrn, who later founded the zoological station at Naples, and his influence helped in the establishment of this organisation. In 1884 the Marine Station at Granton had been established and preliminary surveys of the Clyde estuary indicated the desirability of setting up a Clyde branch of the Scottish Marine Station. Millport proved to be an ideal location and as a preliminary step an old barge, the *Ark* which had been set up as a floating laboratory was brought from Granton and beached there. Robertson was much involved with this and worked towards the establishment of a permanent building suitable for a marine station. His ambition was realised in

1896 when building commenced, but unfortunately he died a month later. Amongst his many publications some 70 appeared in *Proc.* and *Proc. & Trans.* and the dredge he invented is described and illustrated in *Proc.* I (1858-69).

Edgar A. Smith (1847-1916), an eminent conchologist, was an assistant keeper in Zoology at the British Museum. He became a corresponding member of *NHSG* in 1888, was for a time president of the Conchological Society of Great Britain and Ireland and was a founder member and later president of the Malacological Society of London whose *Proceedings* he edited until shortly before his death. He was largely responsible for building up the magnificent collection of shells at the museum and wrote a monograph on the bivalve molluscs obtained during the cruise of the H.M.S. *Challenger* (1872-86), the reports of which laid down the foundations of the modern science of oceanography. In all he produced some 300 papers on Mollusca as well as a few on echinoderms. His contribution to science was recognised by his being awarded The Imperial Service Order during the reign of King Edward VII.

Sir D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, C.B., F.R.S., F.R.S.E., D.Litt., (1860-1948), a corresponding member from 1887, was one of the giants of zoology during the last years of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. In 1884 he was appointed Professor of Natural History at University College, Dundee, where amongst many other activities he founded the Museum of Biology, then in 1917 he moved to a similar post at St. Andrews. Always interested in marine biology he served on the Fishery Board for Scotland from 1897 until 1939 and produced many papers on fisheries and oceanography. In 1888 he addressed the Society on 'Museum methods' expressing the view that many natural history collections were mere store-houses of specimens and that "to enable the educative value of such collections to be fully realised, the specimens should be so arranged as to afford a view of the life-history of each group". His greatest work was the monumental book *On Growth and Form* (1917), in which he explored the extent to which the form of living things could be interpreted in terms of the physical forces acting on them during their lifetime. He was a fine teacher, and in the words of one of his students "you didn't only learn about zoology, you were educated". He was fluent in French and was an accomplished classical scholar producing *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (1895) and *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (1945).

Sir John Graham Kerr, M.A., LL.D., F.R.S., F.R.S.E. (1869-1957) joined the Society as an Ordinary Member in 1902 but later was elected Honorary Member. As Regius Professor of Natural History, later Zoology, at Glasgow University (1902-35) he completed the fine Zoology building (now named after him) with its museum in 1923.

He was mainly interested in morphology and embryology but was also deeply concerned with marine biology and was a member of the Advisory Committee on Fishery Research being chairman from 1942 until 1949. He was critical of the running of the Marine Station at Millport in its early days believing that it should undertake a continuous programme of research and recording, after the manner of the Naples Laboratory, and that its staff should liaise freely with both amateur and professional biologists. Later he devoted much time to the organisation of this station and was president of the Scottish Marine Biological Station from 1942 until 1949. In 1930 he was one of a group of biologists who sought to acquire Possil Loch as a bird sanctuary and was involved in setting up the Scottish Wild Birds Sanctuary Trust. He was interested in the application of correct biological principles to working out a system of camouflage involving the use of obliterative shading and disruption to render ships less conspicuous in time of war and approached the Admiralty in 1914 to advocate the use of such methods. After some mistakes his ideas were adopted and were even extended to land installations during the Second World War. He published the textbook *A Zoology for Medical Students* (1921) as well as many papers in national and local periodicals including *Proc. & Trans.* and *G. Nat.* One paper of particular interest in *G. Nat.* II (1910) includes a list of the type specimens of over 200 species of insects described by J.C. Fabricius and 21 corals described by Ellis which are lodged in the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University. He edited *Glasgow, 1928*, a handbook issued in connection with the British Association (B.A.) meeting at Glasgow in 1928, and occasionally lectured or exhibited specimens at meetings of the Society. He received many honours including the Linnean Gold Medal in 1955.

Sir C. Maurice Yonge, C.B.E., Ph.D., D.Sc., F.R.S.E., F.R.S. (1899-1986) was Regius Professor of Zoology at Glasgow from 1944-64 after being, from 1932 to 1944, the first Professor of Zoology at the University of Bristol. He joined the Society as an ordinary member in 1945 and gave several lectures at meetings. He was a distinguished marine zoologist being a leading authority on molluscs and the biology of coral reefs. He organised the Great Barrier Reef Expedition of 1928-29, subsequently writing the book *A Year on the Great Barrier Reef: the story of corals and of the greatest of their creations* (1930). He wrote the New Naturalist volumes *The Sea Shore* (1949) and *Oysters* (1960) and in collaboration with F.S. Russell, *The Seas* (1928) and with J. Barrett, the handbook *British Marine Life* (1944) as well as a large number of papers in scientific journals. Sir Maurice also served on various fisheries advisory committees and was elected to honorary membership and honorary offices in at least nine scientific and marine societies and associations. In 1957 he received the Mackdougall-Brisbane Prize of the

Royal Society of Edinburgh and in 1968 the Darwin Medal of the Royal Society. He also held honorary D.Sc degrees from four British Universities.

James Fairlie Gemmill, M.A., M.D., D.Sc., F.R.S. (1867-1926) joined the Society in 1898 and served as councillor, vice-president and president. His interests were in medicine and biology and in 1906 he was appointed first as Lecturer, and later in 1918, as a Research Fellow in Embryology at Glasgow University, where the only previous Research Fellow had been Lord Kelvin (also a member of the Society). He spent much time working at Millport and was the first president of the Marine Biological Association of the West of Scotland. He made many communications to the Society including several articles on marine organisms in *Proc. & Trans.* Of unusual interest is a small volume *Natural History in the Poetry of Robert Burns* which was edited from the manuscript of an undelivered lecture found posthumously amongst his papers and published by his brother in 1928. Dr. Gemmill left Glasgow in 1919 when he was appointed Professor of Natural History at University College, Dundee and on the occasion of this the distinguished zoologist Professor E. W. MacBride of Imperial College, London said "I know of no more brilliant researcher at present living in the United Kingdom, so far as Zoology is concerned".

Turning now to studies of vertebrates, the contribution of Robert Gray, F.R.S.E., (1825-87) must be considered. Gray was present at the original meeting in 1851 when it was decided to form the Society and, a banker by profession, he became a distinguished ornithologist. For many years he was a frequent contributor to *Proc.* and he served as Treasurer (1854-56), Secretary (1858-71) and Councillor (1871). He was elected an Honorary Member in 1877. He also held offices in the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the Royal Physical Society and was a prominent member of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh. His book *The Birds of the West of Scotland* (1871) was a classic for its day.

John A. Harvie-Brown, F.R.S.E., F.Z.S. (1844-1916) was a distinguished vertebrate zoologist who joined the Society in 1866, was President 1882-83 and was elected an Honorary Member in 1901. He published a variety of papers on mammals and birds and made several contributions to *Proc.* and *Proc. & Trans.* He was best known for his *A Vertebrate Fauna of --- series of books published alone or jointly. Areas covered were --- Sutherland, Caithness and West Cromarty* (1887), --- *the Outer Hebrides* (1888), --- *the Orkney Islands* (1891), --- *Argyll and the Inner Hebrides* (1892), --- *the Moray Basin* (1895) and -- *the North-west Highlands and Skye* (1904).

Hugh Boyd Watt, F.Z.S., M.B.O.U., (died

1941), was an original member of *ANG* (1885) and joined *NHSG* in 1896. An underwriter by profession his chief natural history interests were birds, mammals and ancient Scottish woodlands and he was active in the Clyde area before leaving for London where his interests were maintained. Before leaving he published papers on heronries, rookeries and on both land and sea mammals in *Proc. & Trans.* and papers on 'The Return of the Swallow' and on Scottish Forests and Woodlands in *Early Historic Times* in *Ann.* He wrote the section on 'Mammalia' in the Handbook, *Fauna, Flora and Geology of the Clyde Area* produced for the B.A. meeting in Glasgow (1901) and with John Paterson and John Smith 'The Natural History of Ailsa Craig' which appeared in *Ann.*

Alexander Ross, F.E.I.S., (1857-1940), was headmaster of a Glasgow school who joined both *ANS* and *NHGS* in 1894. In *ANS* he immediately became Joint Honorary Secretary and later convener of the Entomological Section and a member of the Publications and Library Committee. In *NHSG* he served on the Council and became Joint Honorary Secretary in 1903, a post he held for 18 years. He was President 1920-23 and Joint Editor 1926-35. His interests were ornithology and entomology, especially Diptera and he made numerous contributions by exhibiting specimens and presenting papers at meetings of the Society. He wrote 'The Birds of Islay', 'Some Additional Notes on the Birds of Islay' and 'The Summer Birds about Tarbert, Loch Fyne' for *G. Nat.* and was involved in the planning of the Clyde Card Catalogue prepared for the B.A. visit to Glasgow in 1928. It was his motion that led to the transfer of the Society's library to the Mitchell Library and he supported the amalgamation of the three societies in 1931.

One of the great strengths of the Society has always been entomology and many prominent entomologists have appeared amongst its ranks. James Joseph Francis-Xavier King, F.E.S., (1855-1933) joined *NHSG* in 1872 when he was about sixteen years old and was librarian for several years from 1883 becoming Vice-president in 1921 and finally an Honorary Member in 1928. He also joined *ANG* in 1890 where he held office on the Council. An artist by profession he was a teacher and later Librarian at the Glasgow Art School but he also lectured on Insect Economics at the Glasgow Technical College and clearly his first love was entomology. He spoke at and exhibited specimens at meetings frequently from 1873 until 1930 and published numerous notes and papers on Scottish and Irish insects in *Proc.*, *Proc. & Trans.*, and *G. Nat.* as well as contributing the sections on Microlepidoptera, Trichoptera, Odonata, Orthoptera and Neuroptera-Plannipennia to the B.A. Handbook of 1901. He was an extremely ardent collector and filled numerous cabinet drawers and large numbers of cigar boxes with tightly packed, pinned specimens each bearing a

label with the place of origin and the date. These huge collections, estimated to contain some half a million specimens, were donated to the Hunterian Museum at Glasgow University where many have still to be sorted and identified.

Another ardent insect collector was Anderson A. Fergusson, F.E.S. (1877?-1949), who first joined NHGS in 1888, served on the Council in 1918 and 1922 and was President 1929-30. He was interested in Coleoptera, frequently exhibiting specimens at meetings and contributed numerous notes to *Proc. & Trans.* and *G. Nat.* He wrote the account of Coleoptera for the 1901 *B.A. Handbook* and followed this with supplements published in *G. Nat.* With Graham Kerr he was involved in setting up The Scottish Wild Birds Sanctuaries Trust. His collection of mainly Scottish Coleoptera was donated to the Hunterian Museum, and as with King's collection, although to a much less extent, a proportion of the specimens have still to be determined.

Robert Henderson (1864-1940), by profession foreign correspondent to an engineering firm, specialised in collecting Diptera. He was born in Tipperary and came to Glasgow about 1870, joining *ANS* in 1889 and *NHSG* in 1899. Serving on the *NHSG* council on several occasions he became Vice-president in 1918 and later served as Joint Auditor (1922-26). He wrote the section on crane-flies for the *B.A. Handbook*, (1901) and published three updated lists of the Clyde Diptera in *Proc. & Trans.* VII and VIII between 1904 and 1908. He also helped to compile the Clyde Card Index for the B.A. meeting of 1928. His extensive collection of British Diptera was bequeathed to the Hunterian Museum.

Leonard A. L. King, M.A., F.R.S.E., a professor at the West of Scotland College of Agriculture, joined *MSG* in 1904, became an Honorary Member in 1907 and was President 1909-30. He joined *NHSG* in 1906, was a member of the Zoology and Entomology sections, served on the Council, became Vice-president in 1923 and finally President 1934-36. He was the Society's representative to the Royal Philosophical Society of Glasgow in 1944 and was chairman of the committee which prepared the Clyde Card Catalogue in 1928. He had very wide interests ranging from leeches and sea-spiders to insects and birds. He contributed much to the work of the Society by lecturing, exhibiting specimens, by leading excursions and by publishing notes, obituaries etc. in *G. Nat.*

Iain Colin Christie, B.Sc., (1930-91), joined the Society in 1978, served on the Council 1980-82 and 1986-88, was Zoology Convener 1982-84 and Vice-president 1984-85. By profession a farmer, he had a deep and broad knowledge of natural history with a special interest in the Lepidoptera and he initiated the series of insect record papers published each year in *G. Nat.* which started as 'Lepidoptera

in Strathclyde, 1983' but was gradually enlarged in scope until now all insects and the whole of Scotland are covered. From the start he took an active part in the affairs of the society by giving lectures, exhibiting specimens, reviewing books and publishing articles in *G. Nat.* His interests and detailed knowledge extended far beyond Entomology and included birds, mammals and plants. His last full paper was on the ericaceous plant *Ledum groenlandicum* Oeder on Flanders Moss.

Roy Albert Crowson, D.Sc., A.R.C.S., D.I.C. (1915-99), one of the most eminent coleopterists of all time, first joined the Society in 1951 and was Vice-president 1967-69. He participated in numerous excursions and published many papers in various journals including *G. Nat.*, as well as books on *Biology and Classification* (1970) and on the *The Biology of Coleoptera* (1977). In 1980 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Linnean Society in recognition of his contribution and in 1994 a two-volume Festschrift, or celebratory collection of papers, entitled *Biology, Phylogeny and Classification of Coleoptera* was published in Warsaw to commemorate his 80th birthday. His pinned insects have been incorporated into the collection of Coleoptera at the Hunterian Museum. His collections of microscope slides and of material preserved in alcohol were bequeathed to the Natural History Museum, London.

W.D. Russell Hunter, B.Sc., Ph.D., D.Sc., F.I.Biol., F.L.S., F.G.S. joined the Society in 1948 and was very prominent in its affairs until 1963, when he was appointed to a professorial post in U.S.A. A specialist in fresh-water and marine littoral molluscs, he published over 120 papers either alone, or in partnership with his wife, Myra, and / or colleagues. Amongst papers in *G. Nat.* were studies of the structure and geology of the Garvelloch Islands and of their molluscs and birds. He served on the Council from 1952 and was Editor 1955-63. He was also the Society's representative to the Scottish Field Studies Association. Now living in retirement in the U.S.A. he still retains his membership of the Society.

Bernard Zonfrillo, Ph.D., joined the Society in 1969, served on the Council in 1972, was Ornithological Convener 1973-86 and Vice-president 1977-78 and 1985-87. Originally a quantity surveyor he turned to natural history and is not only a leading authority on birds but is also interested in Marine Biology, Entomology and Botany. He has lectured to the Society, led excursions and reviewed numerous books and, in addition to articles on birds, his numerous contributions to *G. Nat.* range from observations on Risso's Dolphin to notes on ferns, moths and butterflies. His paper 'The Flora of Ailsa Craig' (1994) is a major contribution to the knowledge of that island. In recognition of his work he has been awarded Honorary Research Associateships at both

the Marine Station at Millport and at Glasgow University.

John A. Gibson, M.B., Ch.B., M.D., FRCGP, DOBstRCOG, C.Biol., F.L.S., F.R.G.S., F.R.M.S., F.G.S., F.S.A.(Scot) is a family doctor who is also most active in natural history circles with special interests in the vertebrates. He joined the Society in 1951 and amongst many papers on natural history accounts of the 'Land Mammals of the Clyde Faunal Area' and of the 'Reptiles and Amphibia of the Clyde Faunal Area' were published in *G. Nat.* He has been editor of the Scottish Naturalist since 1972 and chairman of the Scottish Natural History Library since 1974. Dr. Gibson has held office in several natural history societies and was a recipient of the gold medal of The Society for the Protection of Birds in 1967 and of the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1977.

Edward Geoffrey Hancock, B.Sc., F.M.A., a taxonomic entomologist with particular interests in the Diptera joined the Society in 1985, became a councillor in 1987, Zoology Convener in 1988, President 1990-92 and Vice-president 1993-94. He

has been much involved in the recent survey of the Glasgow Botanic Gardens by members of the Society and in dealing with the acquisition and storage of overseas exchanges in the library. With the aid of Heritage Lottery funding, along with Margaret Reilly of the Hunterian Museum, he has drastically improved the collections of pinned insects by using modern steel storage cabinets and arranging for the determination of unidentified material. He has lectured to the Society, arranged excursions, published papers and book reviews in *G. Nat.* and has continued the annual publication of 'Scottish Insect Records' initiated by Iain Christie.

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Ronald Matthew Dobson (b. 1925) became a member of the Society in 1963, after moving to a lectureship in 1959 at the University of Glasgow from Rothamsted Experimental Station, Hertfordshire. His career until then included employment at the Ministry of Food Infestation Division and Department of Agriculture for Scotland and had concentrated on economic aspects of entomology, initially in the beetle genus *Carpophilus* (Nitidulidae) on which 9 papers have appeared concerning their taxonomy and importance as pests of stored products. Numerous papers on agricultural pests have been published such as anthomyid Diptera (wheat bulb and root flies), tipulids (leatherjackets/craneflies) and ehrysomelids (flea beetles), these last being the subject of his doctoral thesis from the University of London awarded in 1955. Much of the material which grew steadily from these studies has been deposited in the Hunterian Museum (Zoology). In addition numerous insects from faunistic surveys of Scottish localities, particularly from the Muck Islands and the Blackwood of Rannoch (*G. Nat.*) can be found in the museum. Many specimens from expeditions with students to South Uist and Portugal are in the collections of which Ron was an honorary curator. Since his retirement the museum has benefited also from much work on identifying backlogs of unidentified British beetles.

Within the Society he served as Editor (1984-1995), initially assistant editor from 1964, Vice-president (1976-78, 1991-93, 1995-97), Zoology convener (1972-81) and a council member on various occasions. He is probably one of the most regular meeting attenders along with his wife Ruth and he delivered lectures to the members. Ruth Dobson not only functioned as Society Librarian but shared interests in natural history have resulted in co-authoring or authoring many of the papers and short notes on the fauna and flora of Muck Islands and Ardnamurchan (*G. Nat.*). These papers were reprinted and sold to tourists in these areas boosting both the reputation and the income of the Society